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The Collection of Statistical Data on Migration in Azerbaijan

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Introduction

In the post-Soviet period in Azerbaijan—especially in the 90's due to war with Armenia, and the political chaos and economic collapse after the breakup of the USSR—serious problems surrounding the statistical records of migration processes arose on the part of the State Statistical Committee (Goskomstat), the main department in this sphere in the republic. Subsequently, the situation involving records of population movement began to improve. However, problems remained. And they were largely connected to the fact that during this period in Azerbaijan, there were many other government departments besides Goskomstat working on issues related to population migration statistics: the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, the State Committee on Refugee Affairs and Internally Displaced Persons, the State Committee on the Affairs of Azerbaijanis Living Abroad, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of National Security (MNS), the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. Each of the above ministries and committees had a special department that poorly coordinated with the others on this issue.

Only in recent years has the situation started to change a little for the better, especially after the creation of the State Migration Service (SMS) in 2007, which has a mandated function to merge state control over migration processes, including statistical records. But this process is in its early stages and for now more than 80% of the statistical data on population migration is still administered by Goskomstat.

Sources of Statistical Data on Migration

At the present time, the main sources of statistical data on migration streams to Azerbaijan are:

- Records of border crossings;
- Population registration by place of residence;
- Population census records;
- Records of aliens and stateless persons

Registration and records of **persons crossing the border** takes place on land, air, and sea border crossing points and covers both emigrants and immigrants. Border guards (who report to the MNS) make a copy of the passport of the person crossing the border, then send information on the number and nationality of the party to the MIA and to Goskomstat. At the same time, other data (sex, age, place of birth) are not taken into account. Adding to the complexity is the fact that one person can cross the border several times during the year, which makes it difficult to have real statistics on migration.

More accurate data pertaining to population movement to and from Azerbaijan can be found in the system of **population registration by place of residence**, which was famous in Soviet times as a residence permit, associated with a change of one's **place of permanent residence**.

However there are serious flaws in this system. Many Azeri citizens are not removed from the register when traveling for emigration, especially when traveling to CIS countries. But an even larger role is played by the fact that the process of removing someone from the records and registration is very difficult, and therefore emigrants prefer not to inform the authorities about any changes in their permanent place of residence, even if they are absent for several years and actually living in a different country (especially in CIS countries), traveling to the country of their official residence only episodically.

As for aliens, the situation is extremely complex. Immigrants who have come to Azerbaijan for a period up to 30 days are required to register at their place of arrival—which can be an airport, train

station, sea port etc.—and fill out the appropriate migration card. A similar procedure is set out in the law “On the Place of Residence and Registration,” which was adopted in April 1996 and entered into force in January 1997. In accordance with the law, the card consists of three pages that are meant contain all information about the arrival. The first part of the card is to remain with the border service. The alien keeps the other two parts, one of which he is to leave with law enforcement agencies when he registers at the place of arrival. The third part of the migration document is to remain with the alien and be with him during the entirety of his stay in the territory of Azerbaijan. When leaving the country, the alien gives this part of the migration card back to the border guards¹.

All this should allow for accurate control over migration streams in the country. However, the leadership of the just-created SMS nevertheless felt that this law, which had just entered into force, did not to respond to new realities and therefore this specific paragraph about the migration card has remained on paper to this day.

It is thought that other institutions should also offer statistical assistance on emigrants to Goskomstat. On one hand, the embassy and consular services of Azerbaijan should maintain **consular records** of citizens of the republic who are staying abroad. This data should then be reduced to a single form, based on the data of all diplomatic missions for a specific period of time, by special request of government agencies. However in reality this is not the case. On one hand, Azeri emigrants very rarely come into contact with embassy and consulate staff for many reasons: in European countries the majority of emigrants belong to the opposition-minded segments of the population or simply do not trust the officials. On the other, the MIA of Azerbaijan does not keep continuous statistical records based on national level data.

It is also thought that this work should be carried out by the “State Committee on the Affairs of Azerbaijanis Living Abroad.” After all, their function includes active work with Azeri emigrants. In reality they work on promoting government policies in certain countries and come into contact only with those immigrants and their organizations that are loyal to the regime. Not to mention the fact that this institution does not maintain regular statistics on the national level.

Finally, issues relating to labor emigrants are handled by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population. However, in actuality this government institution covers only an extremely insignificant number of emigrants—i.e. those who go abroad on a work contract, mainly as doctors to Islamic Eastern countries.

In these circumstances, the only hope lies with the **population census**. In the Post-Soviet period in Azerbaijan, censuses were conducted on the basis of the president of Azerbaijan’s special decree once every ten years². After the country gained independence in 1991, two censuses were conducted—one in 1999 and one in 2009. Both times the results of the census were published in Azerbaijani and in English in 10 volumes and put onto Goskomstat’s website. While the census was being conducted, citizens of the republic were supposed to fill out a questionnaire that included 35 questions, 29 of which related directly to the individual respondent and the remaining 6—to the places and circumstances of his residence³.

However the censuses only counted the resident population, meaning those officially registered according to their place of residence. But there is no information about the present population, i.e. about those citizens who were actually in the country at the time of the census. This is a deliberate

¹ A. Mamedova. Head of the Migration Service: “The Largest Number of Immigrants Arrives to Azerbaijan from Pakistan.” May 04, 2007 <http://news.day.az/society/78721.html?crnd=148>

² On the Progress of Work in Preparation for Censuses in 2010 in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States - www.cisstat.com/council/38cpcc/38cpcc-old/1/zap1.doc

³ In Azerbaijan the General Population Census is Launched, April 13, 2009 <http://www.newsru.com/world/13apr2009/prp.html>

policy because otherwise the difference between the resident and present population would yield accurate data about the emigrant population. But in that case this would be a huge blow to the government's propaganda that the economic situation in Azerbaijan is getting better all the time and that the numbers of emigrants are insignificant.

On the other hand, not all homes participated in the census. Finally, there were many cases, especially among refugees and IDPs, in which families hid the fact that one of the members of their family emigrated. All of these are very serious shortcomings that do not give the full picture with regards to emigration⁴. Things are a bit better with census materials on immigration—here the story is adequately reflected and allows for a reliable database on this specific aspect.

Conclusion

As we can see, migration statistics in Azerbaijan are not at a satisfactory level. Coverage of migrants, both of immigrants and emigrants, through existing sources of information is incomplete. In addition, the issue of migrant records is politicized in modern Azerbaijan and this also has a serious impact; one cannot treat the material from Goskomstat and the SMS as reliable information.

At the same time, there are some positive aspects. In particular, the chaos that existed in the first decade of independence and the lack of a single coordinated record of migrants has in recent years gradually started to change. There is a cause for some optimism; on August 01, 2013 the Migration Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan (RA) was adopted, which indicates the need for registration, migration records of aliens and stateless persons, and a compilation of records about their movements. Accordingly, migration records are conducted by the relevant executive agencies with the help of the Unified Migration Information System⁵.

As a result, at the present time in Azerbaijan the collection of data, the management and use of information in the area of migration is governed by the regulations “On the Interagency Automated Information-Retrieval System “Entry-Exit and Registration””. The interagency automated information-retrieval system “Entry-Exit and Registration” is a specialized state information resource. As such, the system is constantly being updated and improved. On November 02, 2013 by presidential decree, an item was added to the text on the information-retrieval system which requires citizens of the republic to present proof of identity at the ASAN service centers. Aliens and stateless citizens are required to present a document that authorizes temporary or permanent residence in the territory of Azerbaijan⁶.

At the same time, the RA Migration Code more clearly defines the system by which government agencies share information about migration with each other and establish information resources on this basis. This system includes the following:

Information Included in the System

The system includes information about: aliens and stateless persons who have violated migration laws; persons who have been granted temporary residence in the territory of Azerbaijan, immigration status or refugee status (persons seeking asylum); documents issued by law to aliens and stateless persons by

⁴ Yunusov A. Ethnic Composition of Azerbaijan (from the 1999 Census) – http://www.iea.ras.ru/topic/census/mon/yunus_mon2001.htm

⁵ Article 8.2 of the RA Migration Code.

⁶ Decree of the RA President on amendments to the RA Presidential Decree No. 744 from April 22, 2008 on the automated information retrieval system “Entry, Exit, and Registration”. November 02, 2013 - <http://www.president.az/articles/9918> (in Azerbaijani); In Azerbaijan amendments to the regulations on the automated information retrieval system “Entry, Exit, and Registration”. November, 02, 2013. <http://vesti.az/news/179746>

the RA State Migration Service; the extension of the period allowed for temporary residence of aliens and stateless persons in the territory of the RA; as well as registration by place of residence of aliens and stateless persons and permission for temporary and permanent residence.

Information Provided by the System

The System provides information about: passports and visas of aliens as well as registration when crossing the border; the registration of aliens by their place of residence and place of arrival; proof of identity issued to stateless persons living permanently in the territory of the RA for the purpose of going outside the country; aliens and stateless persons who are under criminal investigation and about whose detention a decision has been made— either charged in a criminal case or detained in a criminal case; requests for readmission; and information issued in response to data requests.